

MAKING HER MARK



Tami Strunk, parking enforcement officer for the Camas Police Department, marks car tires with chalk on Northeast Fourth Avenue in downtown Camas. Marking the tires enables Strunk to keep track of the cars that park in areas restricted to certain time periods. KIM BLAU/The Columbian

Two-hour parking enforced in Camas

Business owners say too few parking spaces keep customers away

By ANNE HART
Columbian staff writer

CAMAS — She's jokingly called the Chalk Witch. The sight of her careening through downtown Camas in her tiny, one-seater truck can make people race to their vehicles. The marks she leaves behind, white chalk lines on rear tires, determine who has been parked for too long.

Tami Strunk is the only parking en-

forcement officer in a city of 10,870 people. The longtime Camas resident waves to people running to move their cars as she patrols the tree-lined Fourth Avenue and side streets. She writes tickets to longtime friends. Her goal is to keep spots available for customers in a downtown where meters are nonexistent and parking is scarce.

"We've had customers say they turn around because of no parking and go to Subway," said Sandra Mortensen, who runs the Downtown Deli on Fourth Avenue. Subway, in a shopping center on Third Avenue, has its own parking lot.

Rented downtown spots for employees somewhat dilute the problem, but have become so rare and coveted that many are

passed down through friends.

Strunk tries to make people obey the two-hour parking limit. Many don't and face a \$15 parking ticket if a chalk-marked tire isn't moved after two hours. Of that amount, the city pays \$5.88 to the Clark County District Court for processing.

In the city of Vancouver, a ticket for an expired meter is \$7 and can be reduced to \$5 if paid within two days.

Other drivers in Camas practice what has become the controversial tradition of "move to evade." That way, they can park near shops in two-hour slots. Within two hours after Strunk chalks their tires, they drive their vehicles around the block.

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Tami Strunk

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Parking

City declines to make it illegal to move car to evade ticket

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When they return and park, the chalk mark is moved.

"I know which cars do that. But as long as the chalk is moved, I can't do anything about it," Strunk said.

One business even sets a timer in order to beat Strunk.

Proposed ordinance

Camas police recently considered bringing an ordinance before the city council to make moving to evade illegal, but decided against it.

For the past several years, downtown organizations told police they wanted the process stopped, said Police Chief Don Chaney.

"Several businesses have employees or business owners who would plug up customer space," Chaney said.

But then members of the Camas Chamber of Commerce and Camas Downtown Association decided they didn't want tougher parking laws after all, Chaney said. He plans to hold off taking the proposed ordinance to the council.

So moving to evade will remain a legal Camas custom. And that's fine with Strunk. She said her goal is to keep spaces available,

not rake in revenue.

"If I don't write any tickets in a day, that's great. I'm just down here to keep the traffic moving," Strunk said.

Meanwhile, Camas Downtown Association and the Camas Chamber of Commerce plan to take comment from the public and try to find solutions to the perennial problem, said Paul Fearn, downtown association president.

Fearn runs Fearn Chiropractic & Rehabilitation Clinic on Fourth Avenue and pays about \$20 a month for one private parking space. Most private parking spots cost around \$30 per month, he said.

"We want people to try to be good neighbors, not to take up all the prime parking spots," Fearn said.

Parking isn't a problem in other small Clark County cities such as Battle Ground and Ridgefield, officials there said. Most businesses have parking in the rear for employees.

Possible solutions for Camas include building a municipal parking area or allowing parking on Fourth Avenue for customers only, business owners and employees said.

"Parking really affects our business because we have a lot of old people who are customers," said Karen King, a waitress at the Ideal Corner Cafe on Fourth Avenue. "We see them drive by looking for spots and they will leave if they don't see a close one."